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ABSTRACT

In 1960, Mount St. Mary's College (MSMC) opened the Doheny campus as an alternative for students who had potential for college, but who were not eligible to enter MSMC's traditional baccalaureate campus. The Doheny Campus has consistently developed innovative programs to enable students to successfully complete associate in arts degrees and also baccalaureate degrees at the main campus. The success of MSMC's efforts to retain its ethnically diverse student population is attributed to a coordinated program of academic development and support services. The program involves the following components: (1) admissions and testing to identify students with potential for success and their skill levels; (2) required classes to develop skills in areas where testing shows students are weak; (3) an extended, semester-long orientation course; (4) required work with a tutor at the Learning Resource Center; (5) an early warning system to notify students and their advisors of any difficulties the students are having; (6) a residence program capable of housing up to 170 students; (7) availability of courses in the baccalaureate program; (8) career counseling and internships; (9) community outreach; (10) English as a Second Language courses; and (11) multicultural tools and services. The MSMC program is based on the belief that students can succeed in college if placed in a supportive environment where there is individual attention, intervention when difficulties appear, and much feedback from the faculty and administration. (EJV)

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Mount St. Mary's COLLEGE

MOUNT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE, DOHENY CAMPUS: A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF RETENTION FOR AN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE STUDENT BODY

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March 1988

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Mount St. Mary's COLLEGE

MOUNT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE, DOHENY CAMPUS:

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF RETENTION FOR AN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE STUDENT BODY

American Higher Education has from its origins been responsive to changing needs --from elite colleges founded to educate ministers, to the land grant colleges begun to educate agricultural communities, to those colleges that expanded to welcome the G.I. home from war--American colleges have been flexible and innovative. Those German scientists who, during and after World War II, looked for conducive environments to pursue their research, did not choose European universities, but came to the heterogeneous, diverse, open, and adaptive United States universities.

Today that flexibility and adaptiveness is needed even more as American colleges respond to the growing and increasingly diverse young population of our country. The growth of this population is so rapid that in many areas of the country the minority will soon be the majority. The need for this population to be well-educated becomes critical and colleges cannot ignore statistics which show that American education has not been very successful thus far in motivating, funding, and graduating ethnic minorities from either our high schools or colleges. Recent statistics have painted a dismal picture, and recent reforms have called for action and redesign from our educational institutions. Colleges need to reach out to these students.

Some colleges around the country have developed comprehensive programs that have resulted in successful recruitment and retention of ethnic minorities. Other colleges need to evaluate their programs in the light of these successes to decide whether they are indeed willing to commit themselves to the education of this new generation of students. Institutional commitment is an essential first step; funding must be provided and additional personnel and resources will be essential if the program is to be successful.

One such successful program has been in existence at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles since the addition of its second campus in 1960. This campus, begun as an alternative for those who had potential for college but who were not qualified to enter its traditional baccalaureate campus, has consistently developed innovative programs to enable students to successfully complete associate in arts degrees and also baccalaureate degrees at its main campus and at other four-year colleges. The associate in arts program empowers students to succeed through challenging academic programs supported by extensive individualized services. Students may earn an A.A. degree in five areas: business, early childhood education, liberal arts, physical therapy assistant, and pre-health sciences. Most of the units in these programs are transferable to a baccalaureate major and students complete their general education requirements for the baccalaureate degree while completing their associate degree.

Today the Doheny campus reflects the ethnic diversity of the surrounding Los

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Angeles area - 52% Hispanic, 23% Black, 14% Anglo, and 11% Asian - and its programs and curriculum have been redesigned to reflect the changing needs of this new group of first-generation college students. Retention studies indicate that 65-70% of those who enter as freshmen complete the Associate in Arts Degree and, of these, 50% go on to baccalaureate study at Mount St. Mary's College and another 20-30% at other four-year colleges. Some ultimately attain masters and doctoral degrees.

This success is attributed to the coordinated program of academic development and support services outlined below.

1. **Admissions and Testing**

   The program of helping disadvantaged students to succeed in college begins with admission. Students who have a GPA of 2.0 or higher are admitted; those with a GPA below 2.0 are interviewed and their potential for success in college is assessed. If they show promise, are motivated, and desire to attend college, they are accepted. Once accepted into the associate program, all students are tested and a tentative schedule of skills courses (reading development, basic math, composition, and study skills) and regular college courses is drawn up with the help of an advisor.

2. **Required Skills Classes**

   Students are required to take remedial classes in areas where testing shows they are weak. These classes are graded "credit"/"no credit" so that a student can repeat courses until she reaches the required level of competence without affecting her GPA. Students are encouraged to get a head start on college by taking some of the needed skills courses in the Summer Skills program. This is a free, voluntary, intensive three week program that offers reading, math, writing, and review of scientific thinking. Students choose two of these based on their advisors' recommendations, and all take a required course in study skills. Personal assessment and individual advisement by College faculty and staff are the key to making this first experience a success.

3. **Extended Orientation**

   Students are required to take a semester-long orientation course in which they meet weekly with a small group of their peers and a faculty/staff mentor to discuss concerns and difficulties. The group helps students to solve problems and to look at their own gifts, abilities and goals in a positive and realistic manner. During the course of the semester, each student does a personal gifts assessment, a personal skills inventory and a career exploration project which she discusses with the Director of the Career Center.

4. **Learning Resource Center**

   In conjunction with the freshman English course, each student must spend one additional hour per week at the Learning Resource Center where she works with a tutor on an individualized plan designed by her English instructor. Tutors in this Center are adults who have experience as elementary school teachers and who are warm and caring individuals. In addition to the tutoring available, the students are also encouraged to take advantage of individualized instructional software in reading, English composition, and basic mathematics. Frequently class instructors design learning packages so the student, working at her own pace, can use the

audiovisual hardware to reinforce classroom learning. The instructor and the tutor communicate regularly regarding the student's progress.

5. **Early Warning System**

Instructors notify the student and her advisor in October (second semester: March) of any difficulties the student may be having in a course. The advisor meets with the student to determine the cause of the difficulty and to suggest a course of action. The Dean consults with the advisor and then sees each student who receives two or more of the early warning notices, reinforcing the necessity of taking the corrective action recommended by the advisor. Student, advisor, and Dean meet again at mid-semester if the student is in danger of receiving a grade lower than a "C." Students who receive less than a 2.0 semester GPA are placed on academic probation for the next semester. A support group, facilitated by a trained counselor, meets to assist these students, and most are back in good standing by the next semester.

6. **Residence**

In the last four years, the housing capacity of the Doheny Campus has increased from 35 to 170 beds. The College encourages associate students to live on campus, funds many of them, and provides a residence program that is supportive and designed to assist the student become a mature and responsible human being. For many students, residence is the only way to insure a quiet, orderly place and uninterrupted time to study. Commuter students can also be successful, with faculty and staff going out of their way to help non-residents cope with the additional challenges they face--time management, transportation needs, and family responsibilities.

7. **Courses in the Baccalaureate Program**

Students are encouraged to take courses in areas of strength and, in their second year, to take at least one course in the baccalaureate program. This allows the student to maximize her potential and to move as quickly as possible into her chosen major. Many of the Asian students, for example, are strong in mathematics and science, but weak in communication skills. These students may take math or science in the baccalaureate program and communication skills in the associate program. This provides an easy transition to the baccalaureate major. The College provides shuttle bus service between the two campuses on a regular schedule.

Baccalaureate faculty and students meet with associate students to discuss majors, requirements, career options, and careers that MSMC alumnae have pursued. Counselors from the California State system also visit the Doheny Campus, hold information sessions regarding their baccalureate programs, and meet individually with interested students.

8. **Career Counseling and Internships**

In addition to the career inventory which is part of extended orientation, the Career Center provides workshops and classes in career exploration, health careers, resumé writing, and interview techniques. Internships which give academic credit--and sometimes stipends--are available, and students are encouraged to pursue these in their sophomore year. Helping them set realistic career goals is an important part of motivating students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They need concrete and tangible steps that they can accomplish in a relatively short time. Thus, many have an associate degree as a first career goal. When they see that they can earn the A.A., many move on to a higher goal.

9. **Outreach to the Community**

Students perform supervised volunteer service in community agencies and share these experiences in seminars conducted by faculty members as part of the Outreach component of the associate program. The group works at deriving meaning from each student's Outreach experiences, relating them to academic learning and larger social issues. The student keeps a journal of her Outreach experiences, and the agency supervisor submits a written evaluation. Speakers and films are also a part of the seminars, and these introduce the student to various social problems connected with her volunteer work. Outreach students realize they can contribute positively to society, clarify their career goals and become aware of social ills. Many students are motivated to continue as volunteers.

10. **E.S.O.L.D. Program**

Students of ability who are not fluent in English, perhaps because they are recent immigrants to the United States, can enroll in the Mount's English as a Second Language program (English for Speakers of Other Languages and Dialects) concurrently with their communication skills classes. The extra-help foreign language approach often makes the difference between success and failure for non-native speakers interested in the associate program.

11. **Cultural Awareness**

Administrators and faculty in the associate program have long been aware that cultural values and expectations influence how a student learns. A recent Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education (CAPHE) grant has enabled members of the College faculty and staff to develop multicultural tools to use in helping students, both in the classroom and in support services. One project, for example, is a bibliography of literature written since the 1960's by Black, Hispanic, and Asian women for use in English classes.

Students of all ethnic backgrounds find respect for their heritage in the associate program, which helps them to feel more at home in the college environment.

Our belief that students can succeed in college if they are placed in a supportive environment where there is individual attention, intervention when difficulties appear, and much feedback from faculty and administration has been reinforced by the success of Mount students.

Another essential element needed for the success of minority students seems to be the need for a critical mass of ethnic minority students who can be of support and encouragement to one another. A spirit of community is key for these students who often come from homes where families do not understand the demands of college and who often need the student's earnings to keep themselves from dire poverty. Families often place demands on students who then feel guilty for not meeting those demands. Only other students from like situations can assist in pointing out the long-range benefits to the family and the student.

Much has been written about the need for adult role models for the various minority populations. Small liberal arts colleges have not been very successful in attracting competent, minority faculty and staff--there are just not enough to go around. Student peer groups can help fulfill this need--Seniors to Freshmen, college students to high school students. Another method of providing ethnic role models is to initiate an advisory board of successful community/business leaders who meet with both students and faculty and

administrators. Mount St. Mary's College has formed such advisory boards, and they have been extremely generous in volunteering their time. Students have been deeply appreciative of their presence.

All of us in American Higher Education have an opportunity and a duty to educate this growing number of ethnic minority students--for their own sake, for the development of their human potential, and for our country. The need for socially conscious, civic-minded leaders continues to press our society to act; students from diverse cultures must be among those leaders if our time is to be enriched and humanized. Although the minority agenda is receiving increasing media attention, the crisis continues to receive all to little action from higher education. Mount St. Mary's has provided a workable solution, especially for Black and Hispanic women, by successfully educating hundreds of these young women. Other colleges need to devise solutions, but we can learn from the attempts of others as together we work toward providing all our young people with the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence for the 21st Century.

For more information about **Mount St. Mary's College** program, contact:

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